

**RESEARCHES ON THE ECO-BIO-GEO ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF
AGROTOURISM IN THE WEST OF ROMANIA**

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Abstract: *The study focused on identifying traditional bio-resources and developing a strategy to promote and implement the regional eco-bio-geo-economic concept, to identify and evaluate the potential of bio-resources and bio-productivity, to develop agrotourism, to establish modern capital indicators, territorial development and development of eco-bio tourism packages in the West of Romania. Agrotourism has some features that distinguish it from traditional, standard tourism, namely: tourism consumption is taking place in the countryside (the essentials are: the quality of rural tourism or agrotouristic pension and the customization and adaptability of farm reception services, knowledge of the natural environment, human and cultural, as well as the originality of tourism products); the touristic offer is genuine, original, diverse and personalized, organized and run by farmers (by village people with characteristic dimension for the represented ethnicity).*

Key words: *agrotourism, eco-bio tourism packages, strategy, promoting, tourism products*

INTRODUCTION

Agrotourism has some features that distinguish it from traditional, standard tourism, namely: tourism consumption is taking place in the countryside (the essentials are: the quality of rural tourism or agrotouristic pension and the customization and adaptability of farm reception services, knowledge of the natural environment, human and cultural, as well as the originality of tourism products); the touristic offer is genuine, original, diverse and personalized, organized and run by farmers (by village people with characteristic dimension for the represented ethnicity). It is a genuine activity added to the agricultural exploitations and not an alternative or a substitute of this. It offers to the population who has poor incomes the possibility to relax and a way of spending their free time (holidays or weekends in rural landscapes, with cultural-educative values and a specific hospitality); it doesn't need big investments to design the general infrastructure and the touristic features; it is a diverse tourism (through its specific diversified and largely spread offer); through a smart management the farmer can create the perfect place for a trip to childhood time for its guests; is not compatible with mass tourism (developed in resorts or urban touristic places).

The theme of agrotourism in the West of Romania as a research instrument of tourism was less addressed in Romanian literature, most of the studies being focused on rural tourism. This specific brand of rural tourism is sustained by the owners of little farms- usually as a secondary activity – the activity of the farm being the major job and income activity. It is often made a difference between” agrotourism” and” farm tourism” which it is usually used to designed the use of the villagers' houses as accommodation places for tourists (guest houses rented during holidays, health homes).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Agrotourism though confused with the two notions of rural tourism and green tourism, has clear differences from the other two. Agrotourism is known as a "form of tourism practice in rural areas, based on assuring meals, accommodation, fun and other inside the household, thus capitalizing the values of natural and human resources of the zone, and contributing to raise the living standard of the rural population"[9].

Another definition considers the agrotourism "a way of tourism practiced in countryside which uses the house with all its facilities. It is the most efficient way of using the local resources from the countryside"[10].

Agrotourism therefore requires staying inside the peasant farm: pension, farm, etc., eating natural products made by the farm and taking part to some extent to the agricultural activities [5].

Agrotourism can also be described as a "specific form of tourism, of a certain complexity, where you can find two independent activities, the economical one, mainly agricol and/or forestier and the actual tourism one that includes food and accommodation, services, tourism circulation, etc."[2].

Radu Rey considers that "in mountain areas that have all conditions, tourism, in an organized form and combined with mountain agriculture can become a complementary solution for the direct support of developing agriculture or farming which will offer positive social and economical effects."[8].

The attractiveness and functionality of the rural tourist area is given by the landscape in which at the same time constitutes a patrimony of the community in a certain region with identity value [1].

Agrotourism permits the development of a wide range variety of the small industry, in the same time preserving the tradition and developing rural services that have positive aspect for the villagers.

There is an interdependence between agrotourism and the other rural economic sectors because this domain determines the development of this activities (fishing, vegetable growth, picking up medical plants, weavers, pottery, handcrafting) and these in return create new development and expansion possibilities for agrotourism.

Romanian rural area spread and diversified, represents not only the most important source of food but mostly represents the heritage of national culture and civilization, constituting the source of Romanian spirituality and historical perenniality of the Romanian nation [7].

Agrotourism is one of the most important economical national sector which wants to develop the rural tourism in close correlation with the local economy, there being a close connection between tourism and the other sectors of the local economy and in this case, especially with the agriculture.

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. General Aspects of Agrotourism Features

Agrotourism has some peculiarities that distinguish it from classic tourism:

■ **although tourism activity cannot be stored just like the one in classical tourism, the peasant household is elastic**, easier to adapt to each situation, and the agrotouristic activity is an alternative activity, sometimes auxiliary, it does not lead to serious situations of cessation of the existence of households.

However, a proper organization of these activities must take into account several essential aspects for its effectiveness:

■ A first aspect is to **know the exact capacity of the tourism absorption**. This capacity implies both the evaluation of the accommodation spaces, especially the

correlation with the possibility of providing the food, with the transport and other services, which, according to the advertising made, can be made available to the tourists. The lack of such a correlation leads to either the waste of resources and their inefficient use, or, on the contrary (overstressing them with negative consequences on quality) the impossibility to provide the requested services with repercussions on customer satisfaction.

■ Another aspect, closely related to the first, is the **correct estimation of the investments** to be made in a household wishing to do such an activity. In order to achieve positive results, any agrotourism practitioner must provide tourists with the minimum comfort required by such agrotourism rules in force.

Even the simple camping activity in the peasant's household claims certain services that can be accomplished with certain efforts: water, sanitary group, night guard, etc.

Obviously, the more complex the services and better its quality the agrotourism activity has more chances of success.

■ A third issue that needs to be analyzed is that of **opportunities which the rural area offers to diversify the services that can be offered to tourists**. This analysis has a double meaning; it constitutes the clear program of the collateral services that can be satisfied in the respective environment, the intrinsic possibilities of economic development of the rural area.

■ The fourth issue involves a **conscious analysis of the quality (qualitative parameters) of the services that can be offered**. It is important to remember the motivation of rural tourism and agrotourism: that to return to origins, to simplicity, to ancient tradition and customs, to nature.

■ **Agrotourism can be practiced in virtually limitless variants:** from simply assuring the camping site in the peasant garden to simple accommodation in unused rooms or houses, to the most complex and refined forms of accommodation, dining and entertainment.

If the first two activities are simple forms of revenue completion by renting out the surplus space, the others involve complex and diverse efforts.

They are also, in turn, extremely varied: accommodation can be simple or with many facilities and comfort stages; the meal implies a great number of possibilities from breakfast to all three tables or special or occasional orders.

2. Forms of agrotourism

■ Regardless of its forms, the **success of agrotourism derives from its proper organization**. Spontaneous agrotourism cannot be an effective alternative, just providing a minimum of organization; a logical and coherent orientation, and even a specialization can provide the key to success.

The process of implementing such an activity in rural areas is complex, but these efforts are worthwhile, as agrotourism is an optimal way of using rural resources that can ensure a harmonious development of the countryside and at macroeconomic level territorial rebalancing and stopping the rural exodus [6].

Agrotourism is an important source of income growth for rural community members, and for the entire rural environment an alternative of economic and social development.

Agrotourism acts on the rural environment in several directions, all converging, in order to increase the level of development of the respective area:

■ Thus, the economic development of the respective locality is primarily influenced by the increase of the population's incomes, which causes changes in the structure of expenditures, the important increase of the investments, the development and improvement of the transport and communications routes, the expansion of the economic activity

through the emergence of new complementary branches to agrotourism activity (local industry

- Agrotourism also acts on social factors in rural areas, primarily by restricting rural exodus and stabilizing the population;

- the third area on which agrotourism acts, influencing it positively, regards the civilization, education and culture factors;

- agrotourism can also act on the managerial system of the respective locality, on the local organizational factors, mobilizing it, increasing their preoccupations for setting up the rural area in terms of infrastructure, indirectly forcing them to find sources of financing for achieving the objectives of modernizing the roads access, restoration of some tourist attractions, repair of functional buildings, etc.

3. Functions and objectives of agrotourism

Mountain regions in Romania occupy about one third of the total area of the country. Most of the inhabitants of these regions earn their living in agriculture, especially animal husbandry and forestry

Completely neglected because it could not be integrated into the "socialist economy", this area was ignored and marginalized by subjecting it to measures aimed at destroying its economy, especially the flocks and the quality of the animals.

Agrotourism, much developed in the mountains economy of Western countries, must gradually become a new direction for action to achieve the strategic objectives in the mountainous area of our country and a new dimension or function of the mountain household to provide additional income for them.

Under these principles of approach to agrotourism, we believe that the main functions of mountain agrotourism in our country could be those listed by E. Buciuman, namely:

- reducing or even stopping the emigration of the mountain population and, above all, the migration of the mountain agricultural population of those areas.

- ensuring a standard of living and civilization comparable to that of the urban area, which will stimulate the establishment of the active population in the area and will even determine the migration of the population to the mountain area.

- the complex exploitation of the natural resources of the mountain area by producing non-polluting food goods and high-quality non-food goods and competitiveness under the conditions of the market economy;

- protecting the environment, combating all pollution factors of any nature and preserving the clean mountain, even in the conditions of its development for preserving the healthy living conditions of its inhabitants and those who consume its products;

- achievement, as much as possible, of the autonomy of electric power of households and localities in the mountain area by capitalizing on the existing hydrological resources in these areas;

- harmonization of relations between the agricultural sector in general, the livestock sector in particular and the forestry sector in the agrotourism area;

- the use of agrozootechnical products processing industries, other industries and traditional crafts in the mountain area;

- the use of water resources and falls for energy and fishery and natural environment.

The development strategy of the mountain area must take into account the following **objectives**:

- reducing or even stopping the migration of the mountain population and, above all, the migration of the agricultural population in the mountain area, in the following period depending on the conjuncture that determines the employment situation in the rest

of the national economy in the extra-mountain areas. The mountain could be a valid alternative at least for a part of the active population released as a result of the process of upgrading, modernization by automation and robotization of extra-mountain industries and urban activities as well as the reduction of non-agricultural activities;

- ensuring a level of living and civilization in the mountain area comparable to that in the area of the countryside or in the urban environment that stimulate the stability of the population in the area and even determine the reversal of active population migration to the mountain area;

- the complex exploitation of the natural resources of the mountain area through the production of unpolluted food goods and high-quality non-food goods, competitive in the conditions of the market economy.

- protecting the environment, combating all pollution factors of any nature and preserving the clean mountain, even in the conditions of its development for preserving the healthy living conditions of its inhabitants and those consuming its products;

- achieving the energy autonomy of the households, settlements and localities in the mountain area by valorizing the hydrological resources existing in this area;

- amortization of the relations between the agricultural sector and the forest sector in the mountain area;

- increase of the fish production in the mountain waters (lakes and rivers); elaboration of projects for the organization of ponds in mountain households near the water courses with continuous flow.

- development of agro-technological products, other industries and crafts in the mountain area.

The role of agrotourism in the economic relaunch of rural space

The western part of the country, formerly known as the "forehead" of the national economy, seeks solutions to the recovery of the economic situation.

The ethnic component of the Banat population, consisting of Swabians, Serbs, Hungarians, Czechs, Bulgarians, allowed the development of a food cult and habits specific to their area of origin.

The limiting factors are:

- **Infrastructure** (highways, railways, fast and secure banking, postal and telephone services), modest or unacceptable **living conditions** even for modest tourists offered by most peasant households, **insufficient** household training (minimum knowledge of tourism, lack of knowledge of a modern language) and **safety, personal security** of tourists, etc.

The price of the agricultural product consumed in the agrotourism household has no commercial additions, VAT, excise, transport, storage, etc. Meat, eggs, cheese, milk, butter come directly to the consumer's table.

Also, tourist services (accommodation, services, etc.) make the price of the agrotourism product incomparably lower.

Only in weaker or underdeveloped economies, as well as in developing and underdeveloped economies, employment and GDP rates are lower [4].

Agrotourism and inter-ethnic activities lead to balancing mass tourism and, implicitly, to increasing the share of services.

Among the **problems of agrotourism** that stand out from the negative impact we mention:

- the threat to the environment, the intensity of tourist traffic in some cases may constitute a social and environmental problem for the rural area;

- the socio-cultural threat, the disturbance of the natural world destabilizes the small socio-cultural universe of the rural community;

- issues related to planning, local control, public participation and possible partnerships.

Romania's remarkable tourism potential is given both by natural resources (relief variety, climate, hydrography, flora, fauna) and anthropic resources (archaeological vestiges, historical and architectural monuments, museums, memorial houses).

One of the definitions given to the agro-tourism market is that specifying that "agrotourism market is the economic sphere of influence of the agrotouristic offer, materialized by agrotouristic productions, and the demand for agrotourism, materialized by consumption". Thus, viewed in its entirety, but especially in its complexity, the agrotourism market includes a multitude of constituent elements, which must be permanently taken into account:

- the agrotourism supplier, which may be a specialized trade company or an individual economic agent, who can offer a wide range of products, such as: transportation, nutrition, stress relieving by recreation, ambience, excursions, all in fact forming the "agrotouristic product"

- the demand for agrotourism products made up of the vast mass of consumers, either domestic or foreign;

- the normative acts in force, in the form of the most different rules on the tourist traffic regime, the duration of the holiday leave, the conditions of movement in the territory, the public transport, etc.;

- distribution channels for agrotourism products, which have a wide range of shapes;

- the means of information necessary for the transmission to the consumer of all offers of agrotourism products offered by specialized companies;

- the diversification of forms of presentation of interethnic agrotourism, with its peculiarities, as an integrated form of practicing zonal agrotourism;

- the means of transport, from the most simple and traditional to the most complex and sophisticated;

- agrotourism competition - highlighted by all other agrotourism products on the market, through other companies, firms, agrotourism enterprises, which appear on the market simultaneously with their own offer;

- the environment is also a basic element of the agrotourism market, being made up of all the social, economic, cultural and even political factors which influence the activity of the economic agents providing agrotourism services. The peasant household represents the cell of human settlement of the type of village / commune in the rural area.

Functionally, it consists of an agrotourism micro-platform, consisting of the dwelling itself, the auxiliary spaces (summer kitchen, storehouses, etc.) and household annexes (stables, huts, cages, etc.)

The agrotouristic farm must offer a favorable location, an optimal fit in the geographical landscape of the locality, have a pleasant appearance, order and cleanliness, with well-maintained buildings and green spaces.

Interethnic agrotourism, through the diversity of services rendered, is a factor of knowledge and enrichment of the cultural record, a complementary example of economic activity, understanding and good coexistence between ethnicities, nations and peoples, elements that provide health for the body and soul to every consumer of this product.

The speed of dissemination of information compressed time and almost neglects the distance, the succession of new discoveries in all fields of science attracts our attention, the urban environment creates the premises of a permanent stress, only the life in rural areas can relax us, perhaps only because we do not want to reject the adage that "Eternity was born in the village".

CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian village, through its millenary existence, was the thread of our people's continuity on this territory, today's Romania, as an adaptation to the geographic environment, which constituted the crucible of its formation, of its culture and civilization.

The agrotourism potential of the Romanian village is extremely complex, comprising in its composition natural and cultural-historical components of great variety and tourist attractiveness.

Romania's rural development is a synthesis of the researches undertaken in the field. An attempt to address the complexity of the issues of sustainable and balanced development policies in favor of human beings for the improvement of their living conditions, to increase youth's attractiveness of any profession to what is called "country life".

Agrotourism is placed on a level intermediate between the health of the individual and factors of influence. This level allows it to act in a double sense, thus having an important role in the structure of quality of life and implicitly of economic growth.

The theme of Agrotourism in the West of Romania, as an agrotourism research tool, has been little approached in the Romanian scientific literature, with most of the gender studies being conducted so far mainly focusing on rural tourism.

Agrotourism market represent the place in which the supply and demand for tourism product meets and faces.

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